



CLIMATE CHANGE AND U.S. AGRICULTURE:

KYOTO and BUENOS AIRES

Climate change, which is caused in part by the release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, can affect growing seasons, precipitation and evaporation patterns, pest infestations, and weather variability—all of which can affect agriculture. Past and current emissions have already committed the earth to some degree of climate change in the 21st century, so both mitigation and adaptation strategies will be needed.

The international community is addressing the climate change challenge through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which the United States ratified in 1992 and has over 170 member countries. The Convention seeks to stabilize atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases at safe levels. The Kyoto Protocol, agreed to in December 1997, formalizes this commitment and calls for the industrialized nations to reduce their average national emissions over the period 2008-2012 to about five percent below 1990 levels.

One option recognized by the Kyoto Protocol to help countries reduce their greenhouse gas emissions is through activities that sequester carbon. The Protocol provides forest-based carbon sequestration activities to be counted toward a country's green house gas reduction commitment. Furthermore, the Protocol provides for additional activities, such as activities on croplands and rangelands to be included over time.

In early November 1998, delegates to the Framework Convention met in Buenos Aires, Argentina, to continue work on implementing the provisions of the Kyoto Protocol. During the Buenos Aires meeting:

- 1) The United States became the 60th country to sign the Kyoto agreement on November 12. To enter into force for the United States, the Senate must provide its advice and consent for ratification. The President has stated that he will only submit the Protocol for ratification if and when we achieve meaningful participation by key developing countries.
- 2) Two developing countries, Argentina and Kazakhstan, pledged to take on commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; and

- 3) Governments agreed on an ambitious Plan of Actions that establishes deadlines for finalizing the outstanding details of the Kyoto Protocol.
- 4) Of particular importance to agriculture was the work plan on carbon sequestering activities. Governments agreed to:
 - ▶ Task the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) with writing a report on carbon sequestration. This report will help governments interpret and implement the Kyoto language on carbon sinks;
 - ▶ Hold a second international workshop in the United States on forest and agricultural sinks (one workshop was recently held in Rome on forestry activities and on scoping the IPCC report); and
 - ▶ Make decisions regarding the interpretation and implementation of sink activities in 2000.